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U-2 flights disquieting for Turkey

US request prompts check with Soviets first

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The agreement reached between the United States and the Soviet Union on a SALT II treaty is having wide-ranging implications for Turkey.

It comes at a time when the Turkish Government of Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit is very sensitive on the subject of East-West détente — and when Turkey is trying to establish closer ties with the third world and Soviet-bloc countries.

One prime Turkish concern about the SALT agreement is the reported US request that Turkey allow American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft to use its airspace for SALT II verification purposes.

The Turkish Government is said to be seeking guarantees from the Soviet Union that this would not be considered a hostile act before it gives such permission to the US. Some soundings on this subject are understood already to have been made with the Soviet Union.

Neighbors considered

A government statement on May 14 said U-2 spy flights would be considered by Turkey only if "the requested contribution advances the objectives and concurs with the understanding of the parties of the treaty."

"It is only natural," the statement added, "that Turkey takes into consideration her own security and relations with her neighbors." (The latter phrase presumably refers to the Soviet Union.)

If Moscow's assurances are secured, Turkey apparently will have no objection to the U-2 flights. Otherwise, Mr. Ecevit will face another serious problem. Public opinion in Turkey clearly remembers that in 1960 a U-2 aircraft based in southern Turkey was shot down in the Soviet Union, leading to much tension between the two neighboring countries.

The US request for Turkish permission to fly

the U-2 over Turkey is said to have been made formally during the visit of Assistant Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Ankara last week.

It has been learned that the request was conveyed to Premier Ecevit by Mr. Christopher, acting as President Carter's special envoy. Mr. Christopher discussed with Turkish leaders the question of a new joint defense agreement, which would determine a permanent status for the US military installations on Turkish soil.

Two of these, a listening post at Sinop, on the Black Sea, and a radar station at Pirinlik in southeastern Turkey, were reactivated last fall, after the lifting of the US arms embargo on Turkey, but only on a one-year basis.

The US now is seeking a permanent arrangement, but negotiations have so far been inconclusive, mainly because Turkey is insisting a long-term (five years) defense agreement, during which the US will provide substantial military and economic support to this NATO ally.

US experts estimate the cost of the weapons and other material requested by Turkey for the five-year period to be nearly \$15 billion, although the Turks estimate it at only \$2.5 billion.

Both the Sinop and Pirinlik installations could play a major part in verifying Soviet compliance with the SALT II agreement — particularly now that the American listening posts in Iran are not in operation.

Now operating from Cyprus

While agreement on a new mutual defense treaty does not yet seem in sight, the US is said still to be pushing for Turkish acceptance of the U-2 flights. These aircraft, now operated from a British base in Cyprus, will be able to monitor from the Black Sea area, within Turkey's airspace, military activities inside the Soviet Union and verify Soviet compliance with the SALT II treaty.

Mr. Christopher is said to have told Mr. Ecevit of the important role that Turkey may play in securing the ratification of the SALT treaty, and therefore détente, by allowing such flights.

Mr. Ecevit presumably would be glad to take part in American détente efforts, if the U-2 flights were to be considered as a contribution to that effort. But it is not yet known what the Turks would do if the Russian response is negative.

At a time when the West is speeding up efforts to secure financial aid for Turkey and the Carter administration is pushing Congress for more military and economic support for this country, it will be a difficult decision for the Ecevit government.